

MANHUNT

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I EASED the car to the curb, and Frank got out. He went into the drugstore for cigarettes.

Fifty feet ahead of me, the exhaust of an idling sedan drifted toward the sidewalk. My eyes moved routinely to the license plate and the number rang a bell.

I checked with the clipboard on our dash, and then opened the right hand door to get out.

I stopped when I got one foot on the sidewalk.

The car was parked in front of a currency exchange office, and there was something going on up there. I could almost smell it; I knew that it had to be bigger than a stolen car.

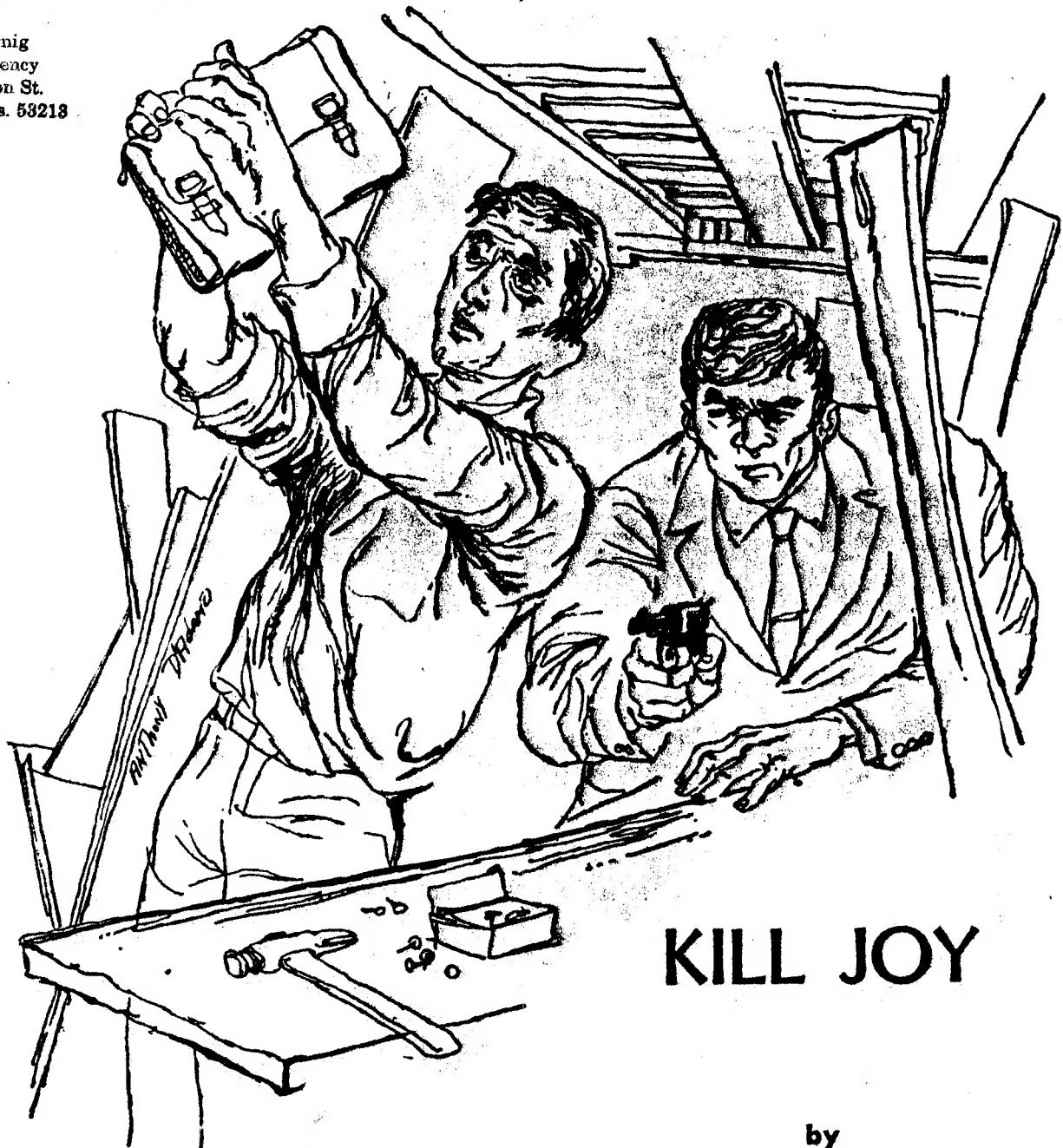
The man behind the wheel reached across and opened the rear door of the sedan.

I slipped the shotgun out of its sling in the back of my car. While I waited, my fingers gently rubbed the cool metal of the barrel.

Two men came out of the building at a trot, and both of them had automatics in their right hands. The first carried a zipper bag and he tossed it into the sedan.

I leveled the barrel of the twelve gauge at his chest and pulled the trigger. The big No. 1 shot stopped him before he could get a foot inside the car.

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KILL JOY

*They were going into the currency exchange office—
so I just took out my shotgun and fired twice . . .*

by

JACK RITCHIE

I smiled slightly as I pumped another shell into the chamber.

The second man was short and heavy. His eyes widened at what he knew was coming, and his mouth opened to shout against it.

I fired again. His face twisted with shock as he dropped to his knees.

The driver of the car snapped his head back to look at me. He held a handkerchief over his mouth and nose, but I didn't need to see his face. The parallel scars cutting through his left eyebrow were as good as a signature.

I knew who he was and that made things different.

Our eyes met for a second as he pulled the door shut. He gunned the engine of the car and roared away from the curb.

I kept the barrel of my shotgun pointed at the back of his head all the way to the first corner. Then I raised my aim and fired high over the car.

Frank was out of the drugstore now, his .38 in his hand. He fired two quick shots at the sedan, but as far as I could see, he did no good.

My eyes went back to the sidewalk. The first man I'd shot lay sprawled on his face, but the other was still on his knees, staring stupidly at his own blood on the sidewalk. The automatic dangled loosely in his hand.

I glanced quickly at Frank. His attention was still on the sedan, and he was trying for another shot.

I pumped one more shell into the chamber and aimed at the kneeling man. I fired and finished him.

I slid back into the car and slammed the door. "Take care of them, Frank," I yelled. "I'll get the one in the car."

When I pulled away and kicked the siren, I glanced back. Frank was staring at the two bodies, and his face was gray.

The tires squealed as I took a corner. Ahead of me I caught a glimpse of the dark sedan. It took another corner.

When I got there, I kept going straight.

After a while I killed the siren and slowed down. I got in contact with headquarters and gave a general description of the car, but I mentioned nothing about the license number.

When I got back to the currency exchange office, three squad cars were already there and a couple of officers were trying to keep the souvenir hunters away from the bodies.

Frank was inside talking to a thin middle-aged man wearing rimless glasses.

I joined them. "I lost him, Frank."

Frank's face was stiff. "At least you got two for the morgue, Al. That ought to make you happy."

He studied me a moment more and then turned to the thin man. "This is Mr. Mader. He's the manager of this place."

I nodded and introduced myself. "Sergeant Wil-

liams."

Mader's face was pale and his hands trembled with nervousness. "They took about sixty thousand dollars. This is a Friday. We usually have that amount to cash pay checks."

An ambulance edged its way through the crowd on the street outside. The attendants got out and leaned on their folded stretchers while they waited for the picture crew to finish.

Frank lit a cigarette. "Mr. Mader, your desk is close to the window. You must have caught at least a glimpse of the driver of the car."

Mader's watery blue eyes became vague with thought. "Everything happened so fast. I really don't remember too much about him."

Frank turned to me.

I shrugged. "All I ever saw was the back of his head. But I'd guess he was an all-around average. Maybe five seven, brown hair, weight 145." All that was true enough.

Mader sipped water from a paper cup. "They came in shortly after we opened. The tall one came directly to my desk and the other stood near the door."

"How about your alarm button?" I asked.

Mader shook his head. "The tall one pointed the gun at me and threatened to shoot if I stepped on it. I'm positive he would have done that if I had been so rash."

The glass front doors swung open and Lieutenant Philips came striding through. He nodded to Frank and me.

"We just fell into this, Lieutenant," Frank said.

I started the story from the beginning. "Fifteen minutes ago I pulled up to the drugstore down the street so that Frank could get some smokes. While he was gone I noticed what was happening here."

I glanced at Frank. "When they came out, I called to them to stop and put up their hands. But they weren't having any of that. I had to use the shotgun."

Philips turned to Frank. "That the way it happened?"

Frank's face was blank. "I was in the drugstore and I didn't get to see much." His eyes flicked over me. "I didn't hear too much either."

Philips had a tight smile. "How many shots did they fire at you, Al?"

I shrugged. "I didn't wait for that."

He studied me. "That makes six you've killed since you joined the force."

Mader watched me with eyes that held a faint horror.

I grinned at him. "Be happy I'm on your side."

A half an hour later, Frank and I took Mader down to headquarters to look at the pictures. I leaned against the window frame and watched Mader going slowly through the big books.

When he started on the second volume, Frank left the room to see if any of the bodies had been

identified.

Mader's forefinger flowed from picture to picture as though he were reading a ledger and he glanced at me uneasily from time to time.

At eleven o'clock I brought him the fourth book and I stayed near. When he got to the page with Charley O'Hara's picture on it, I was standing at his shoulder.

His finger touched Charley's picture for a moment, the thin face with the parallel scars through the right eyebrow, and then moved on.

I went back to the window and lit a cigarette.

Frank returned five minutes later. "We identified one of them. His prints were in our files. Edward Riley. He's the one you shot twice."

"He still had the gun in his hand, Frank."

"He wasn't going to use it," Frank snapped. "I could see that."

I shook my head and smiled. "You don't know that, Frank. I like to make my decisions fast."

Mader spent most of the day looking at the pictures but he came up with nothing. We let him go at three in the afternoon.

At five Frank and I checked out for the day.

He was silent until we got to our cars in the parking lot. "What keeps you on the force, Al? Is it the big pay and the retirement plan? Is it the hunting license that makes your kills legal?"

I smiled. "It gives me a good feeling to protect the weak and the innocent, Frank. That's what it is."

I watched his car pull away and then got into mine. I drove to the new housing development on the north side. I made my way slowly through the planned curves and pulled up in front of Charley O'Hara's ranch-style house.

Charley answered the door bell himself. He stood in the doorway, his thin face tense. "What do you want now?"

I grinned. "Just a routine check, Charley. Have a hard day at the shop?"

His face was sullen. "This is my day off."

I nodded. "But you look so tired, boy. Let's go inside and talk about it."

His stare was hostile, but he stepped aside.

I took a seat in the living room. "Having a hard time with the payments to this place, Charley? The shoe must pinch when you got a wife and two kids to support." I patted the chair I was sitting in. "This on time payments too?"

Anger flickered in his eyes.

I crossed my legs. "Where's the wife, Charley? And the kids?"

His lips were tight. "They're visiting her mother."

"I guess you were expecting me, weren't you, Charley?"

He didn't look at me.

I let half a minute pass. "One of the boys was Ed Riley. Who was the other?"

He lit a cigarette and took nervous puffs. "What the hell are you talking about?"

I smiled. "Aren't you grateful, Charley? I could have blown your head off."

I clicked my tongue. "Let's not play games, Charley. I saw you this morning and you saw me. We both know that."

He walked away from me and stood at the picture window watching the houses across the street. Finally he turned. "All right. Why didn't you blow my brains out?"

I smiled. "You've been wondering. Did you come up with any answers?"

His laugh was bitter. "I suppose you want half of the money?"

I shook my head. "No, Charley. All of it."

His temper flared. "Go to hell!"

"I want all of it. Every cent you took this morning. Either that or I take you in. Your wife and kids are going to miss you, Charley."

I let him have the time to think about it.

He ground his cigarette savagely into an ash tray. "I got it down in the basement."

I opened the button of my suitcoat and loosened my gun in its holster. "Fine, Charley. That's real fine. We'll take a look at it. But be careful, Charley. Real careful."

I followed him down the stairs. He went to the partially finished recreation room and reached up into the rafters.

I had the gun out, just to make sure he wasn't going to try anything, but he brought down the zipper bag and nothing more.

I took it from him and indicated a stool. "Sit there, Charley." I dumped the contents of the bag on a work bench and began counting.

Charley sat still, watching me, and moisture glistened on his forehead.

When I finished, I shook my head sadly. "That's only thirty thousand, Charley. That's only half."

He smiled thinly. "That's what I got. That's my share."

The thin voice came from behind me. "He means that the other half is mine."

I stiffened.

"Don't touch your gun, Sergeant. Turn around slowly."

Mader had an automatic in his hand. His eyes glittered behind the rimless glasses. He nodded at the expression on my face. "Yes, Sergeant, I was part of it, too."

I half rose. "Now wait a minute. We can work something out."

But he smiled.

The same way I do when I'm going to kill a man.